

Employment Problems of Older Workers

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The employment problems of workers aged 45 and over were the focus of a recent survey made by the Bureau of Employment Security of the Department of Labor. Some of the findings of the survey, which is part of the Department's broad program of research into all economic aspects of the problems of older workers, are presented in the following pages as part of the Bulletin's efforts to report on resources of older persons.

A MAJOR challenge to any society is the need to provide employment to those able and willing to work. Achievement of this goal can be impeded when society itself creates difficulties that have no real justification. One group against whom needless restrictions have been directed is the "older worker," through the imposition of employment barriers on account of age.

Considerable uncertainty surrounds the reasons for these restrictive attitudes. It is apparent that many of the biases are intangible and unsupported by evidence. The conflict arises in part from the tendency toward generalization. People think of older workers as men and women who have reached some arbitrary, chronological age such as 45, 60, or 65. In reality, the age at which a worker becomes too old to work varies widely with his occupation and industry. Age restrictions in actual practice are determined by individual employers and are usually applied in advance of any review of the individual jobseeker's qualifications. Ideally, each worker should be considered for employment on the basis of his abilities in relation to the requirements of the job.

The prevalence of artificial age barriers to employment is a problem that may become even more serious because of the greater longevity and the increasingly aged composition of the Nation's population. Life expectancy at birth is improving; between 1900 and 1954 it rose from 46 to 67 years for men and from 48 to

73 years for women. The segment of the population aged 45 and over is increasing more rapidly than the total population. While the population of the United States doubled between 1900 and 1955, the number in the age group 45-64 tripled and in the group aged 65 and over it quadrupled.

Growth of the older and the younger age groups will continue to outstrip that of the intermediate groups. Between 1955 and 1975, those aged 45 and over will increase 34 percent, those under age 25 will increase 58 percent, but the remainder of the population (those aged 25-44) will increase only 13 percent.

The problem of employment for older women is potentially more serious than that for men because of their more pronounced rate of population growth and their increased participation in the labor force. The greatest relative growth in labor-force participation in the period 1920-55 occurred among women aged 35-64. By 1975, women in the population may outnumber men by slightly more than 3 million. This net excess, however, is confined to the female age groups aged 45 and over and largely to those aged 65 and over.

Description of Survey

Any remedial program designed to assist older workers must first establish the extent to which they are discriminated against in the labor market. Second, it must determine whether the discrimination against older workers is justified on the basis of any special labor-force characteristics.

Accordingly, in 1955-56 the Bureau

of Employment Security and affiliated State employment security offices undertook a comprehensive survey¹ of the labor-market problems of the older worker in seven metropolitan areas: Detroit, Los Angeles, Miami, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Philadelphia, Seattle, and Worcester (Mass.). Five universities participated in various phases of the study. The survey areas were selected partly because they represent varied characteristics in the national economy, as well as different parts of the country. Their combined population in 1950 totaled almost 14.0 million, and in January 1956 their wage and salary workers in nonfarm employment numbered approximately 5.9 million.

Among employed workers, only those in firms of eight or more employees and covered by unemployment insurance programs, including the program for railroad workers, made up the group considered in the Bureau study. More than a third of the 3.9 million employed workers in the sample (during 1956) were aged at least 45, and 3 percent were aged 65 and over. The highest concentrations of employed workers aged 45 and over were found in Philadelphia (42 percent) and in Worcester (39 percent). Older workers represented 31 percent of the surveyed employment in Miami and 32 percent in Los Angeles.

To obtain information on the unemployed workers, a sample was obtained of a weekly average of 160,000

¹ The survey was made by the Department of Labor in its program for studying older worker problems. The Department has published seven reports on these problems—*Older Worker Adjustment to Labor Market Practices: An Analysis of Experience in Seven Major Labor Markets; Job Performance and Age: A Study in Measurement; Older Workers under Collective Bargaining: Part I, Hiring, Retention, Job Termination, and Part II, Health, Insurance, and Pension Plans; Pension Costs in Relation to the Hiring of Older Workers; Counseling and Placement Services for Older Workers; and How to Conduct an Earning-Opportunities Forum in Your Community.*

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jobseekers in January-February 1956 at public employment offices in the seven survey areas. Persons aged 45 and over represented 40 percent of the total; the 65-and-over age segment constituted 10 percent. The proportion aged 45 and over ranged from 33 percent in Los Angeles and 35 percent in Detroit to 52 percent in Worcester and Miami and a high of 65 percent in Seattle.

The fact-finding study sought to measure the range and character of the older worker's employment problem by collecting and analyzing information regarding (1) the characteristics of the unemployed older workers, (2) employment patterns and hiring practices as they relate to older workers, and (3) the nature and scope of services rendered older workers through the local offices of the Federal-State employment security system. The third aspect of

Table 1.—Percentage of job openings with specified maximum age limits, by occupational group, industry division, and size of firm, April 1956

Classification	Specified maximum age		
	Under 35	Under 45	Under 55
	Occupational group ¹		
Clerical.....	35	57	67
Unskilled.....	26	49	61
Professional and managerial.....	28	45	54
Sales.....	20	37	52
Service.....	9	35	48
Semiskilled.....	16	33	43
Skilled.....	9	15	28
	Industry division ¹		
Finance, insurance, and real estate.....	36	60	69
Transportation, communication, and public utilities.....	36	53	63
Wholesale and retail trade.....	24	47	60
Durable manufacturing.....	25	46	57
Nondurable manufacturing.....	23	42	48
Government.....	19	34	45
Construction.....	19	32	44
Service.....	10	29	43
	Size of firm		
1-7 workers.....	14	35	47
8-19 workers.....	19	35	47
20-49 workers.....	21	38	51
50-99 workers.....	28	41	52
100-499 workers.....	27	53	64
500-999 workers.....	38	61	70
1,000 or more workers.....	30	49	59

¹ Ranked by percentage specifying age limits under age 45.

the study, which was intended to lead to the development of an enhanced program of local office activities that would meet the special needs of older workers, is not considered here.

In the course of the study, data were collected through personal interviews of older and younger jobseekers at local employment offices. Data regarding older and younger employed workers were collected from questionnaires sent to a sample group of employers. Employer practices and policies were examined to reveal attitudes toward older workers as reflected in hiring and layoff operations over a 12-month period. Attention was directed to the implications for older worker hiring patterns of differences in pension-plan coverage and size of firm.

The analyses and conclusions are based only on data secured in the seven metropolitan areas studied, which may not be typical of the national pattern. Nor are the data necessarily fully representative of the situation in each of the seven areas. Among other limitations, the employer samples were drawn only from establishments that were covered by the State or railroad unemployment insurance programs and the unemployment sample was limited to those seeking work through public employment offices. Averages for the seven areas combined should be used with caution.

Impact of Age Restrictions

Employers may discriminate against older workers in the hiring process because they evaluate their services on a lower scale than those of younger workers. Typical reasons ascribed for this lower evaluation are limitations in physical capacity, performance, or work habits and can be fancied or real. Employers may also impose barriers because they find it administratively undesirable to give older workers hiring preference. Typical administrative factors militating against the hiring of older workers are adherence to promotion-from-within policies and the existence of pension plans.

Whatever the justification, the older worker is disadvantaged in his search for a job. The difficulty starts

with the age restriction on the job specification. Implementation of employer policy is reflected in hiring records, which demonstrate the bias against older workers. The effect on older jobseekers is immediately apparent; once unemployed, they have greater difficulty in finding a job and have longer spells of joblessness.

Job Opening Specifications

An examination of 21,400 job openings listed with local public employment offices during April 1956 in the seven-area study revealed that an upper age limit of 55 or less was specified for more than half of them. The high was 72.0 percent in Miami, and the low was 23.5 percent in Worcester, where a State law prohibits discrimination in employment on account of age but permits "preferred" ages to be specified. In about two-fifths of the job openings, the upper age limitation was under 45. Overall, job openings for men and women showed almost identical percentages having upper age limits of

Table 2.—Percentage distribution of hires, separations, employment, and jobseekers, by age and sex, seven areas, selected periods¹

Age and sex	Hires	Separations	Employment	Jobseekers
Total.....	100	100	100	100
Under 45.....	78	76	66	60
Under 25.....	25	23	13	12
25-34.....	30	30	27	25
35-44.....	23	23	26	23
45 and over.....	22	24	34	40
45-54.....	14	14	19	16
55-64.....	6	7	12	14
65 and over.....	2	3	3	10
Men.....	100	100	100	100
Under 45.....	76	73	64	57
Under 25.....	21	19	10	13
25-34.....	31	31	28	24
35-44.....	24	24	26	20
45 and over.....	24	27	36	43
45-54.....	15	15	20	15
55-64.....	7	8	13	15
65 and over.....	2	4	3	13
Women.....	100	100	100	100
Under 45.....	83	82	70	66
Under 25.....	35	33	21	10
25-34.....	26	28	24	26
35-44.....	22	21	25	30
45 and over.....	17	18	30	34
45-54.....	11	12	19	17
55-64.....	5	4	9	12
65 and over.....	1	2	2	5

¹ Data for hires and separations relate to the 12 months preceding the employment count, which is as of June 30, 1955, except for Los Angeles (Mar. 31, 1955) and for Seattle (Dec. 31, 1955). Data on jobseekers are for January-February 1956.

under 35, 45, and 55. These age preferences of employers cut across all occupational groups and industry divisions (table 1), although considerable variation in proportions existed among the seven areas.

Hirings

While workers aged 45 and over made up 40 percent of the jobseekers in the seven areas, they obtained only 22 percent of the jobs filled by employers during the year under study. Similar disparities were found among men and women. Male workers aged 45 and over, representing more than two-fifths of all male jobseekers, obtained less than one-fourth of the jobs for men. Women aged 45 and over, who made up one-third of the female unemployed workers, obtained about one-sixth of all jobs for which women were hired (table 2).

The decline in the number of job opportunities with the jobseekers' advancing age follows a consistent pattern, which becomes even clearer when more detailed age intervals are used in examining the distribution of hires and unemployment. Though workers under age 25 were selected for 25 percent of the job openings, they made up only 12 percent of all jobseekers. In contrast, persons aged 65 and over got only 2 percent of the jobs but represented 10 percent of those looking for work. The turning point is reached at ages 45-54; that age group showed 14 percent of the hires and 16 percent of the unemployment. For men aged 45-54 the two proportions were about equal, but among those in the next older group (aged 55-64) the unemployed outnumbered those getting jobs 2 to 1. For women the turning point is in the age group 35-44; women in this age bracket made up 30 percent of all women looking for work but received only 22 percent of the jobs.

Certain qualifications of these comparisons are important. Hires are, of course, made not only from the pool of unemployed workers (defined to include only jobseekers out of work for at least 7 consecutive days) but also by recruitment of new entrants, reentrants, separated employees seeking work for less than a week, and

Table 3.—Workers aged 45 and over as percent of total hires, separations, employment, and jobseekers, by area, selected periods¹

Area	Percent of total			
	Hires	Separations	Employment	Jobseekers
Total.....	22	24	34	40
Detroit.....	15	18	34	35
Los Angeles.....	24	26	32	33
Miami.....	24	24	30	52
Minneapolis-St. Paul.....	20	22	34	47
Philadelphia.....	18	20	42	40
Seattle.....	30	31	36	65
Worcester.....	21	21	39	52

¹ See footnote 1, table 2.

workers employed in other establishments. If allowance were made for these factors, the relative position of older workers in the hiring process would undoubtedly appear less adverse. The markedly lower separation rate for older than for younger workers is strong supporting evidence. The conclusion is inescapable, however, that persons aged 45 and over who are unemployed have considerably less chance of being hired than younger jobseekers.

Among the seven study areas the older workers got varying proportions of the jobs that were filled. The range was from 15 percent in Detroit to 30 percent in Seattle (table 3). The narrowest difference between the older workers' proportion of hires and of all jobseekers was in Los Angeles. In that city older jobseekers had relatively favorable prospects. The reason undoubtedly lies in such factors as the recency of much of this area's rapid economic expansion and its generally good labor-market conditions.

Similar factors may also be responsible for the situation in Miami. Although that area had the lowest participation rates of older workers in the employed work force of any of the seven areas, it ranked second to Los Angeles in the relative job chances for older workers. Despite the fact that nearly one-fourth of the persons hired in Miami were aged 45 and over, conditions were less favorable for older workers there than in Los Angeles, primarily because of the high proportion (52 per-

cent) that such persons represented of all jobseekers in the Florida city. In Seattle, relatively more older workers were hired and they formed a larger part of the unemployed group than in any other area. Since the turnover data relate to a full 12-month period and the tallies of jobseekers to the seasonal peak of unemployment in the area, the data undoubtedly underrate the relative year-round job chances of older jobseekers in Seattle.

Industry.—The worker aged 45 and over fares best in the construction and service industries, where older workers got 22 percent of all jobs filled during the year under study. The construction industry made 35 percent of its hires from the older age group.

Durable goods manufacturing and transportation, communication, and public utilities accounted for less than their proportionate share of the hirings of older workers, particularly of women. In the finance, insurance, and real estate division, 6 out of every 10 job vacancies were filled by women, but the proportion of women aged 45 or older to all hires of women was extremely low. In the manufacture of nondurable goods, a reverse pattern is indicated, as older women accounted for a relatively high share of the hiring of women; the older men did not do so well. A slightly less-than-average proportion of older workers got jobs in trade, although in the retail segment relatively more older women were hired than in all industries combined.

Occupation.—The relative advantage of the higher skills and longer experience of the older worker becomes apparent when the sample is distributed by occupational groups. In terms of proportions of all hiring actions that involved persons aged 45 and over, the skilled, service, and professional and managerial groups show a favorable picture. In the skilled and service occupations, about 3 out of every 10 persons hired were older workers, compared with the overall ratio of roughly 2 out of 10.

In both clerical and sales occupations, but especially the former, underutilization of older workers is the pattern. The data, however, for

these occupations, where the majority of hires are of women, demonstrate slightly greater-than-average acceptance of older women in sales jobs and considerably less-than-average hiring in clerical jobs. Though 70 percent of the clerical personnel are female, only 1 out of every 10 of the women hired was aged 45 or over. Hires of older women for sales occupations ran to nearly twice that proportion.

In semiskilled occupations, the men hired outnumbered the women 3 to 1. Older women were hired for 24 percent of the jobs for women in these occupations (compared with 17 percent for all occupations), and older men accounted for less than their average proportions of all jobs for men. In unskilled occupations, as in the clerical field, older workers of both sexes were hired for less than their average share of the job vacancies.

Size of firm.—Older workers obtained relatively twice as many hires in the smaller firms as in the larger ones. For firms with fewer than 100 workers, workers aged 45 and over accounted for approximately 26 percent of the hires. In firms with 1,000 or more employees, older workers filled only 13 percent of the job openings. The proportion of hires obtained by older workers in the intermediate-sized firms declined with each increase in the size-of-firm interval.

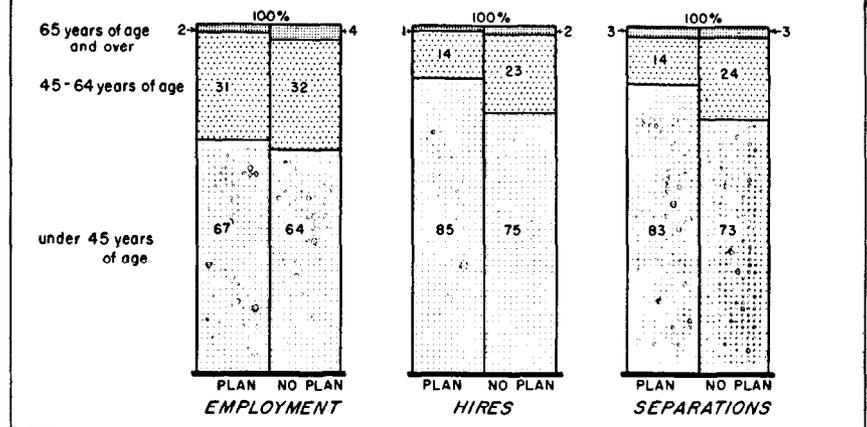
Existence of pension plans.—The older worker is more likely to find a job that is not covered by a private pension plan than one in which he will have such coverage.² Workers aged 45 and over obtained 25 percent of the job openings in employment without pension plans but only 14 percent of the jobs with such plans, as shown in the accompanying chart.

All workers, and especially those

² Turnover data related to pension plan coverage were compiled for a sample of firms having 50 or more employees. These data were not available for Miami. Firms included in this part of the survey employed 2.9 million workers (71 percent of the total), with related hires for the year of 1.3 million and separations of 1.2 million. The exclusion of firms with fewer than 50 workers results in generally lower turnover rates than those shown by the overall data.

EMPLOYMENT, HIRES AND SEPARATIONS BY AGE FOR WORKERS COVERED AND NOT COVERED BY PENSION PLANS

(Six Areas, 12 month period ending June 1955)



aged 45 and over, are much less likely to quit employment covered by private pension plans than they are jobs without such coverage. The quit rate for workers under pension plans was only 5 per 100 for older workers and 23 per 100 for workers under age 45, compared with rates of 14 and 32, respectively, in jobs without pension coverage.

Duration of Unemployment

When older workers become unemployed, they tend to remain out of work longer than younger workers. This condition is accentuated with advancing years. It is true at each educational level and regardless of the industry (other than durable goods manufacturing) to which the older jobseekers were last attached or the occupational skills that they possessed. The duration of unemployment was longer for the older women in the study than for the younger women or for the men of corresponding age.

Industry.—Jobseekers aged 45 and over were unemployed for longer periods than those under age 45 in all industry categories, with the exception of those who had earlier worked in durable goods manufacturing. In that industry division, which provided approximately one-fourth of all jobs held by workers over age 45, they could expect, on the basis of their experience, to be out of work no

longer than the younger workers (table 4). The reason may be the highly unionized nature of the industry, with its recognition of the seniority rights of older workers.

Occupation.—Longer unemployment is experienced in all occupational groups by jobseekers aged 45 and over than by younger workers. In general, 1 in 2 of the workers aged 45 and over was unemployed for 6 or more months in the preceding 3-year period, but less than 2 in every 5 of the workers under age 45. Conversely, relatively fewer older workers than younger workers had shorter periods of unemployment.

Older workers last employed in the professional and managerial occupations reported the shortest unemployment experience of all older worker groups, but they were considerably worse off than younger workers in the same occupational category (table 5). Skilled older workers also experienced relatively more long spells of unemployment. Older jobseekers who last worked in the "white collar" occupations reported shorter periods of unemployment than those in any of the manual or service occupational groups.

Schooling.—Although additional schooling tends to go with shorter unemployment, increased age offsets this influence. Having more formal schooling helps an older worker find a job when he is competing with

another older worker who has less education but does not stand him in as good stead when he competes with a younger worker. Older workers, regardless of educational attainment, are generally unemployed longer than younger workers.

Some 52 percent of the jobseekers aged 45 and over with no more than elementary school education were unemployed for 6 months or more in the 3-year period, as against 44 percent of those older workers with additional schooling. The comparable percentage was only 35 percent for workers under age 45.

Appraisal of Older Workers

The preceding section revealed the not inconsiderable difficulties of the jobless older worker in finding a job. To what extent, if any, are these justified? Are the older worker's personal and work characteristics in-

ferior to those of his younger counterpart? In other words, does the older worker lack certain traits or employment capacities without which he is at a disadvantage in the competition for jobs in the labor market? The remainder of this article compares the labor-force characteristics and work experience of older unemployed workers with those of younger unemployed workers to make such an appraisal.

Comparison With Younger Workers

Industry attachment.—More than 2 out of every 5 jobseekers in the seven areas had their most recent job in manufacturing (table 6). A somewhat larger proportion of the jobseekers under age 45—almost half—had their most recent job in a factory.

Nearly one-fifth of the older job

applicants at the public employment offices had last worked in the construction industry, a somewhat higher proportion than for those under age 45. The relative importance of construction jobs among the unemployed was, of course, affected by the fact that employment in this industry was at a seasonal low at the time of the survey.

Patterns varied among the seven areas. The most striking difference was due to the effect of cold weather on the construction industry. In Los Angeles, for example, where the year-round climate is mild, only 1 in 14 of the jobseekers came from the construction industry, but in the northern cities of Minneapolis-St. Paul and Worcester, the construction industry accounted for 3 out of 10 of the unemployed applicants.

The industrial composition of the areas accounted for other differences. Miami, which is primarily a resort city, had only one-fifth of its unemployed applicants displaced from manufacturing industries. In Detroit, on the other hand, three-fifths of the unemployed applicants had last worked in manufacturing.

Skills.—Among manual occupations (skilled, semiskilled, or unskilled), the degree of skill rises with age. Though workers aged 45 and over accounted for 40 percent of the jobseekers in all occupations, they made up 29 percent of the unskilled applicants, 34 percent of the semiskilled, and 58 percent of the skilled (table 7). It is perhaps more to the point that the proportion of all older workers in the skilled category (27 percent) was more than twice the proportion of younger workers so classified. In Detroit, three times as many of the older as of the younger applicants were skilled workers.

Schooling.—Older applicants had fewer years of schooling than younger jobseekers. Among the factors responsible for this difference are the dramatic expansion in school attendance and the decline in immigration over the years.

Five out of 6 of the jobseekers under age 45 had completed elementary school. In contrast, barely 2 out of 3 of those aged 45-64 had completed elementary school. For

Table 4.—Percentage distribution of jobseekers by age and duration of unemployment in the 3 preceding years and by industry division of last job, seven areas, January-February 1956

Duration of unemployment	Total	Construction	Manufacturing			Trade	Service	Other ¹
			Total	Durable	Non-durable			
Under age 45.....	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Less than 2 months.....	27	28	24	22	27	31	34	27
2-5 months.....	35	36	34	32	36	37	34	40
6 or more months.....	38	36	42	46	37	32	32	33
Aged 45 and over.....	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Less than 2 months.....	20	17	22	20	23	23	20	18
2-5 months.....	31	28	32	35	30	31	32	19
6 or more months.....	49	55	46	45	47	46	48	53

¹ Represents transportation, communication, and public utilities; finance, insurance, and real estate; government; and unreported industry.

Table 5.—Percentage distribution of jobseekers by age and duration of unemployment in the 3 preceding years and by occupation in last job, seven areas, January-February 1956

Age and duration of unemployment	Occupation in last job						
	Total	Professional and managerial	Clerical and sales	Service	Skilled	Semi-skilled	Unskilled
Under age 45.....	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Less than 2 months.....	27	38	33	29	33	24	23
2-5 months.....	35	41	37	32	34	37	33
6 or more months.....	38	21	30	39	33	39	44
Aged 45 and over.....	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Less than 2 months.....	20	26	26	17	21	22	15
2-5 months.....	31	32	33	32	29	31	31
6 or more months.....	49	42	41	51	50	47	54

those in the age group 65 and over, whose formal education was generally completed in the first decade of this century, there was a notable decline in the amount of schooling; slightly more than half had completed elementary school.

In general, few applicants had had formal schooling beyond the high school level. Of the jobseekers in all age groups in Los Angeles, Miami, and Seattle, however, a considerably higher-than-average proportion had completed high school or had some college training. Relatively twice as many of the older jobseekers in Los Angeles as in Philadelphia had gone to high school.

Disability.—A larger proportion of unemployed workers aged 45 and over possessed physical handicaps than did younger jobseekers. One in every 10 workers under age 45 reported one or more physical handicaps (table 8). Among jobseekers aged 45-54, the proportion was 1 in 7; for those aged 55-64, it was 1 in 5; and for workers aged 65 or over, it was 1 in 4.

Job stability.—Older workers are less inclined to change jobs than younger workers. The number of jobseekers holding only one job during their entire period of employment from 1953 to 1955 in all seven areas rose moderately with each 10-year age interval. For men, the pattern of job stability began to increase notably after age 45 and showed its sharpest increase at age 65. Specifically, 36 percent of the workers under age 45 held one job in the 3-year period, compared with 45 percent of the workers aged 45-64 and 73 percent of those aged 65 and over.

Job stability by age group varied considerably among the seven areas. In Worcester, Detroit, and Philadelphia—the areas in which manufacturing employment was significant—holders of one job became relatively more numerous with advancing age than in other areas. In Los Angeles, Miami, and Seattle—all areas of heavy postwar immigration—the increases with advancing age in the number of holders of one job were less marked. In the age group 45-64, single jobholders ranged from more than 1 in 4 to only slightly more than 1 in 3 of all jobseekers in these three areas,

Table 6.—Percentage distribution of jobseekers by age and by industry of last job, seven areas, January-February 1956

Age	Industry of last attachment					
	Total	Construction	Manufacturing	Trade	Service	Other ¹
Total.....	100	100	100	100	100	100
Under 45.....	60	56	64	59	57	56
45 and over.....	40	44	36	41	43	44
45-64.....	30	35	26	32	34	31
65 and over.....	10	9	10	9	9	13
Total.....	100	17	44	17	10	12
Under 45.....	100	16	47	16	10	11
45 and over.....	100	19	41	17	11	12
45-64.....	100	20	39	18	12	11
65 and over.....	100	15	46	15	9	15

¹ Represents transportation, communication, and public utilities; finance, insurance, and real estate; government; and unreported industry.

Table 7.—Percentage distribution of jobseekers by age and most recent occupation, seven areas, January-February 1956

Age	Most recent occupation								
	Total	Professional and managerial	Clerical	Sales	Service	Skilled	Semi-skilled	Unskilled	Other ¹
Total.....	100	6	8	4	10	18	28	24	2
Under 45.....	100	6	9	4	7	13	31	28	2
45 and over.....	100	5	8	5	13	26	24	17	2
Total.....	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Under 45.....	60	65	62	51	47	42	66	71	64
45 and over.....	40	35	38	49	53	58	34	29	36

¹ Represents unreported occupation.

compared with nearly 1 in every 2 in the seven areas combined.

Another indication of the tendency of older workers to "stay put" is the average number of years on a job. Here again, as might be expected from the pattern for holders of one job, the average duration of jobs held increased with age. Interviews with a subsample of unemployed older workers, covering a 15-year work period, showed that although one-third of the age group 45-54 held their jobs for an average per job of 4 or more years, three-fourths of the group aged 65 and over showed a similar average duration. Added evidence of the job stability of older workers is found at the other end of the scale, where only 8 percent of the workers aged 45-54 had an average job duration of 12 years or more in the preceding 15-year period, compared with 46 percent of those aged 65 and over.

A consistent pattern of relationship between age and job stability shows up in the seven individual areas. The tendency for job duration to increase with age applies equally to men and women.

Earnings.—The weekly earnings of workers aged 45 and over were, on the whole, somewhat higher than the earnings of those under that age. Almost half of all jobseekers had last earned \$60-\$99 a week. The highest wages reported, however, had been received by more older than younger workers—a reflection, no doubt, of the higher proportion of skilled workers in the group aged 45 and over. About 22 percent of the older jobseekers earned \$100 weekly or more, compared with only 14 percent of those under age 45.

Older workers aged 45-64 showed a pattern of higher earnings than did the younger workers in all industry divisions, but the difference

was negligible in the service industries. In both trade and service, however, the proportion of workers aged 65 and over who earned at least \$100 a week was considerably below the average for all age groups.

Among jobseekers of both sexes displaced from manufacturing, more than half had last earned \$60-\$90 a week and more than a fourth had earned \$40-\$59. The proportions of older and younger jobseekers in both of these earnings brackets were substantially the same.

Labor-force attachment. — After men have passed the period of military service and advanced schooling, they show a high degree of continuous attachment to the labor force. Their willingness and ability to work do not drop off as they pass middle age. The data do not permit substantive conclusions on this score for workers beyond age 64.

Among men under age 25, almost half were out of the labor force for at least 1 of the 3 years before the survey interview—undoubtedly because of military service or continuation of schooling. For women the pattern of labor-force attachment is affected for the younger age groups by continuation of higher education,

homemaking, and childbearing. The extent of labor-force participation increases noticeably after age 45 and continues high through age 65 (table 9).

In all seven areas studied, attachment to the labor market increases with advancing age. Nevertheless, in Los Angeles and to a lesser extent in Miami, there was a clear pattern of older workers with relatively longer periods out of the labor force than in the other areas. Some of the explanation may lie in the extent to which seasonal activities prevail in each of those areas—for example, resort activity in Miami—as well as the large number of elderly persons who are intermittently available for employment if suitable opportunities become available.

Conclusion

Although many forces tend to put them at a disadvantage, older workers have numerous outstanding work qualities. They possess greater numbers and varieties of skills. They want to work, showing a high degree of attachment to the labor force. Older workers are not job hoppers; they stay on the job for longer periods than younger workers—an important

Table 9.—Percentage distribution of jobseekers by age and sex and number of months out of the labor force in the 3 preceding years, January-February 1956

Age and sex	Months out of labor force				
	Total	None	1-5	6-11	12 or more
Total.....	100	68	13	6	13
Under 25.....	100	40	8	9	43
25-34.....	100	65	13	8	14
35-44.....	100	72	15	5	8
45-54.....	100	76	12	5	7
55-64.....	100	70	13	6	5
65 and over.....	100	79	11	5	5
Men.....	100	73	11	5	11
Under 25.....	100	40	77	7	46
25-34.....	100	71	12	5	12
35-44.....	100	81	12	4	3
45-54.....	100	83	10	4	3
55-64.....	100	79	13	5	3
65 and over.....	100	79	11	5	5
Women.....	100	58	16	9	17
Under 25.....	100	38	12	14	36
25-34.....	100	54	16	11	19
35-44.....	100	59	19	8	14
45-54.....	100	64	14	8	14
55-64.....	100	68	13	9	10
65 and over.....	100	74	11	8	7

quality when an employer is equating age preference with the cost of turnover. On the other hand, older workers as a group have more physical handicaps and less formal education than younger workers.

Averages, of course, are only partly revealing. It is important to consider older workers as individuals. Differences in physical and mental capacities exist not only between persons in different age groups but within the same age groups. The requirements of the labor market are so diverse within different occupations and industries that a proper matching of men and jobs necessitates individual consideration of the factors involved. On the basis of work characteristics revealed in the survey, it appears that older workers, even as a group, compare favorably with younger workers and that the discrimination against them is largely unjustified.

Table 8.—Physically handicapped jobseekers: Percentage distribution by age and type of physical handicap and as percent of all jobseekers, seven areas, January-February 1956

Age	Percentage distribution by type of physical handicap					As percent of all jobseekers
	Total	Vision, hearing, and speech defects	Orthopedic disabilities	Respiratory (except asthma) and cardiovascular diseases	Other	
Total.....	100	27	22	10	41	14
Under 45.....	100	27	22	7	44	10
45 and over.....	100	27	22	13	38	19
45-54.....	100	24	25	10	41	15
55-64.....	100	26	24	15	35	21
65 and over.....	100	32	18	11	39	24